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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5592  
INFO RHMFISS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL//SCJ2//  
RULGPIA/USCOMSOLANT

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 001848

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STATE FOR INR/R/MR, I/GWHA, WHA, WHA/PDA, WHA/BSC,  
WHA/EPSC  
CDR USSOCOM FOR J-2 IAD/LAMA

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: US-ARGENTINE BILATERAL RELATIONS; ARGENTINA'S DECISION NOT  
TO SEND TROOPS TO THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER; TRI-BORDER; 08/17/06;  
BUENOS AIRES

## 1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's leading stories include yesterday's Assistant Secretary Shannon's digital video conference with Argentine journalists on Cuba and U.S.-Argentine relations; the U.S. denial that it was pressuring Argentina to send troops to the Israeli-Lebanese border and an assessment that drug trafficking surpasses terrorism as a concern in the Triple Border area.

## 2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "The US sees a 'transfer of power in slow motion' in Cuba"

Publishing the article headline as the "Quote of the Day" on its front page, leading "Clarín," writes (08/17) "This is a key moment, as much for Cuba as for all the Americas and it would be a serious error to give more oxygen to a regime that is outside of the Inter-American framework. That's the characterization given by the assistant secretary for western hemisphere affairs, Thomas Shannon, in a video conference with the Argentina media.

"The bureaucrat confirmed that the government of George W. Bush does not encourage a military approach to the island. We totally reject that. Only the Cuban people can determine its democratic transition.

"...[he] maintained that his government's policy is to promote in Cuba democratic transition, free markets and regional integration into markets, in its various forms...We want a Cuba with access to the IDB, to all the institutions of the Americas.

"Shannon asserted to the Argentine press yesterday that Cuba should reinsert itself into democracy, with free elections, respect for human rights and more transparency. This is not a bilateral matter between the U.S. and Cuba; but for all the Americas and Cuba.

"With respect to Castro's recovery and the photos shown with Chavez, Shannon said information 'is controlled, it is something opaque, we don't really know the future, it isn't clear...

"And on the relationship with Argentina, Shannon confirmed that it is productive and fluid, with excellent communication."

- "Shannon, War and Democracy"

Santiago O'Donnell, columnist of leftist "Pagina/12," writes (08/17) "That is how the new media strategy of the State Department began to be unveiled, which is no other than the old carrot and stick formula: sticks for Cuba, carrots for the rest of the region, including now for Venezuela and Hugo Chavez...Venezuela could play

an important role in Cuba's transition, and, all in all, Venezuela is the U.S.' most important partner. Venezuela has a commercial surplus with our country.'

"Everything was roses for the countries of the region without the name Cuba. When asked about the possibility of lifting the embargo on the island, Shannon became serious. It depends on what happens, he said in a serious tone. Then he named a long list of demands: release of political prisoners, free elections, non-governmental organizations, full reign for human rights. Everything indicates that unless Cuba becomes Switzerland overnight, the U.S. will continue boycotting it.

"It's true: Posada Carriles is under arrest. Not for being a terrorist, but for entering illegally into the U.S.

"But it's not easy to promote a war on terror and multiparty democracy, all at the same time.

"That's why, I believe, the U.S. launched its diplomatic offensive to again isolate Cuba and promote regime change. We were there to register the event."

- "U.S. Argentine relations are very good"

Jorge Elias, columnist for daily-of-record "La Nacion," starts his article, (08/17) "Pure praise for the relationship with Argentina...the State Department's top official for Latin America, Thomas Shannon, did not challenge the increasingly frequent criticisms of Nestor Kirchner against George W. Bush, nor his increasingly frequent defense of Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales.

"...our relationship continues to be productive and fluid' and 'in the following weeks, months and years there will be opportunities to deepen it,' that 'there are a series of shared interests and values that act as a stabilizer' and that 'cooperation on counterterrorism

has been excellent.'

"It is a key moment in Cuba's history, but also for the Americas -- he said -- we are seeing a transfer of power in slow motion.

"With an eye on Washington and another on Florida, the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, led by the U.S. Commerce Secretary, Carlos Gutierrez, of Cuban origin, proposed 80 million dollars of assistance to the opposition of the island, to support transition. The initiative was well received by the Bush government. Without mentioning that, Shannon said 'our policy continues to be the same: promoting democratic transition.

"Venezuela... could play an important role in the democratic transition.

"Several years ago, President Bush said if Cuba released its political prisoners, permitted fundamental democratic rights... and held free elections, he was disposed to speak to Congress about lifting the embargo. Fidel Castro rejected the offer.

"At the end of the day, Mercosur issues belong to Mercosur.

"We totally reject a military solution. Democratic transition is something that only the Cuban people can decide.

- Business-financial Ambito Financiero also covered the DVC under headline "Latin America should help the political transition in Cuba."

- "The Triple Border, More Myth than Real Terrorists"

Daniel Gallo, columnist of daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (08/17) "For those people with deep knowledge of the area, there is more myth than reality in this triangle formed by Iguazu, Foz de Iguazu and Ciudad del Este.

"No one has ever confirmed a firm, concrete piece of information on terrorist activities in the Tri-Border region: neither through the judiciary nor any other form. There hasn't even been a legal suit

against terrorism on those locations,' reported a person with deep knowledge on every corner of the three cities. 'What happens there has more to do with drug trafficking than anything else,' he added.

"If it is common to affirm that the U.S. pressures to increase security at the Triple Border, what is certain is that the Department of State's own official reports don't give the zone major significance.

"The annual report on terrorism.. [has] a separate section on the Triple Border.. but the document published last April 28 states that 'information on the operations of extremist Islamic groups could not be corroborated.'"

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